2021 | *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 11 (1): 191–201

SPECIAL ISSUE
FERNANDO ORTIZ: CARIBBEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN COUNTERPOINTS
ETHNOGRAPHIES OF TRANSCULTURATION

Minhoto counterpoints: On metaphysical pluralism and social emergence

João Pina-Cabral, *University of Lisbon*

In his classic work *Contrapunteo cubano*, Fernando Ortiz shows how two different plants and the products they yield can be at the base of two distinct forms of life. The fascinating revelation in his essay is how these two products (tobacco and sugar), which are central elements in the emergence of consumer society at the global level, give rise in their local mode of occurrence in Cuba to distinct social environments. In this article I ask, beyond its empirical relevance, what methodological and analytical lessons can we take from his essay? In reinterpreting Ortiz's essay in the light of the forms of life that I studied in Alto Minho (northwest Portugal) in the later 1970s, I hope to draw lessons that can illuminate our own present take on the still momentous matters of social emergence and metaphysical pluralism.

Keywords: Minho, Portugal, metaphysical pluralism, indeterminacy, underdetermination, counterpoint, vagueness, difference

In his classic book *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* ([1940] 2002), Fernando Ortiz shows how two different plants and the products they yield can be at the base of two distinct forms of life. The fascinating revelation in his essay is how these two products (tobacco and sugar), which are central elements in the emergence of consumer society at the global level, give rise in their local mode of occurrence in Cuba to distinct social environments. He outlines the complex relation between the nature of the plants, the nature of the products, the nature of the social relations of production, and the control of the means of production. These, then, come to congeal over time into recognizable traditions of human experience.

So much we have read. Furthermore, we know how influential the essay was in a long and distinguished history of debates concerning globalization, and particularly globalization in the Caribbean and South America (Mintz 1996; Palmié 2006). But, beyond its empirical relevance, what methodological and analytical lessons can we take from it today? After all, it was written so very long ago and it corresponds to a *problématique* (that is to say, to a set of intellectual concerns) that is decidedly no longer our own. In short, in interpreting Ortiz's essay, we necessarily betray his intentions, since (a) we use a different empirical case, and (b) we resituate his argument in terms of theoretical positions he could not have dreamed of. We should have no sense of guilt concerning that, however. In fact, we honor him in this way. We can only entertain the faint hope that, one day in the future, other people might do precisely the same thing to our own contemporary proposals.

Metaphysical pluralism

In this essay, I mean to resituate Ortiz's argument. Empirically, I resituate it in northwest Portugal in the late 1970s, when I carried out fieldwork for what was going to become in 1986 *Sons of Adam, daughters of Eve: The peasant worldview of the Alto Minho* (1986a). Analytically, I undertake to address anew what the Durkheimians used to call "collective representations." That is, I

HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory. Volume 11, number 1. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/713631

seek to understand how collective agreement emerges within spatiotemporally linked social settings giving rise to identifiable "forms of life" that correspond to shared forms of dwelling and care, shared concepts and artifacts, shared modes of personhood, and shared economic arrangements.

I see the value of this exercise largely in providing the tools for ethnography to move beyond the background assumptions concerning the nature of human thinking that are implicit in such standard statements as "the X believe . . . this and that," or "for the X, a is b," or "Xs think . . . this and that." Now, as it happens, in the early 1980s, when the final version of *Sons of Adam, daughters of Eve* was written, we were already grappling with the aporias emerging from the poststructuralist critique of social theory. Ardener's contorted critical essays (e.g., "Comprehending others," [1977] 2007) and Needham's Wittgensteinian writings (e.g., "Analogical classifications," [1978] 1980, or *Counterpoints*, 1987) were already troubling our minds. Somehow, however, we had not been able to see a way past the central forms of thinking that we had inherited from mid-century social theory—either in its Durkheimian collectivist mold or in its North American Parsonian individualist mold. In my book *World: An anthropological examination* (Pina-Cabral 2017), I address this same challenge by exploring possible means of going beyond the mere critique of representationism. Here, I want to further that experiment in the lines suggested by Ortiz's essay.

I start from the basic assumption that *metaphysical pluralism* is the abiding condition of human existence. Husserl noted that "for us who wakingly live in it, [the life-world] is always already there" as a kind of horizon (1970: 142). Yet "there is a difference between the way we are conscious of the world and the way we are conscious of things or objects" (1970: 143). The latter "have actuality for us only in the constant movement of corrections and revisions of validities"—as a kind of "anticipation of an ideal unity" that is never fully accomplished (ibid.). By metaphysical pluralism, then, I mean that everywhere, persons who live awake to the world are open to engage with the world in a creative and dynamic manner, being prone to embrace a diversity of points of view (Pina-Cabral 2018a). As Lévy-Bruhl discovered, persons are not atoms, they emerge from within what he labeled "participation" with other persons (primarily, their early carers) (Pina-Cabral 2018b). As a result, they are prone to engage with a variety of points of view, never holding a single or unique framework of interpretation of the world—the unity of our life-world is never more than something to strive for. Vagueness, in a very general sense, therefore, is the default condition of all *persons*. The word "vague" here bears two essential implications: both that of *indeterminacy*—as in border permeability, ambiguity, ambivalence, and equivocation—and that of *underdetermination*—as in approximativeness, fuzziness, stochasticism, gradualism, and scale-hopping (see Davidson 2001: 75–76; Pina-Cabral 2020).

By placing the focus on vagueness and metaphysical pluralism, I am setting up a contrast with the sort of structural-functionalism that was espoused by most members of Ortiz's generation. Our present analytical condition leads us to diverge theoretically from the mid-twentieth-century generation in two fundamental ways: on the one hand, we reject the *atomistic perspective*—that is, we do not see persons or social groups as unitary, individual entities, but we see them as emergent within sociality and therefore as being ultimately partible and "dividual"; on the other hand, we reject the *mind/body polarization*—that is, we see that sociality is a broad feature of life, that organisms and objects interact in complex ways, and that perception itself is a social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a representational account (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Gallagher 2009).

Notwithstanding, we still recognize that, in the field, ethnographers come to encounter emergent collective entities that require a holistic description in order to be satisfactorily accounted for. The sort of dynamic processes of structural constitution that Ortiz identifies continue to preoccupy us today as ethnographers. For example, he shows that, around tobacco and sugar, forms of life emerge in history that are systemic because they possess properties that are greater than the sum of their parts, and that, as such, can be identified by social scientists and described in their own terms. It does not seem possible to carry out ethnography without implicitly proposing that the forms of life the ethnographer identifies are complex but are identifiable, that is, somehow characterized by emergent properties, possessing a level of systematicity. In other words, what makes up a "form of life" and how can an ethnographer identify it? That is a question that we pose today again but in a new form.

Twentieth-century social science has made us all too familiar with pluralized notions of "cultures" and "social groups," as if these reifications were observable empirical facts corresponding to objectively occurring individual psychological processes of self-acknowledged "identity" as in: "the Xs have a culture which each X transports and by which he or she is identified." Such attributions of psychological identity, however, turn out to

be analytical dead ends, as our poststructuralist teachers were discovering during the late 1970s. In naturalizing "identity," we are assuming, on the one hand, a natural existence to "individuals," failing to see persons as emergent products of sociality, and, on the other hand, we are assuming a representationist account of cognition that turns out to be deeply unsatisfactory. Ortiz's notion of "transculturation," therefore, attempts to resolve a problem that can only be taken to exist to the extent that we stick to a sociocentric culturalist view of "society."

In fact, that is probably the most fascinating lesson that we can draw today from Ortiz's *Cuban counterpoints*. He is not telling us that there are different "cultures/societies" in Cuba. Rather, he is telling us that distinct Cuban modes of living can be identified that are patently diverse and that there are structural implications to this differentiation. Furthermore, he shows us that the affordances provided by the distinct plants, their distinct products, and their distinct processes of global circulation lead to different modes of production, and to different appropriations of the land. Most of all, however, he shows that these forms of life correspond to different modes of personal constitution. In short, he opens the door for an account of metaphysical pluralism in Cuba. Cuban subjects are not all of one mold; they correspond to traditions of personal constitution that differ, since they correspond to the emergent properties of these different forms of life.

Minhoto lives

Allow me now to carry out an exercise of retrospective projection. When I found myself in the late 1970s in the rural valleys of the Alto Minho (northwest Portugal), I observed a region and a people that were in the throes of a major transformation—it was all too patent to anyone moving around (including the *minhoto* themselves) that consumer society was making big inroads into rural forms of domestic life and modes of personal and collective constitution that had been identifiably in existence since at least the middle of the eighteenth century, when a new configuration of rural economy dependent on maize production had become locally instituted (Pina-Cabral 1986a: 1–30). By dating it in this way, of course, I am already intervening, since it took me and my historian colleagues at the time quite a lot of effort to identify the historical parameters of the forms of agricultural and communitarian integration that made rural society so readily identifiable to anyone who became familiar with the region.

Yet, as an ethnographer at the time, if I were to be able to produce an ethnographic description, somehow, I had to identify (a) what different forms of life were in existence in the region—since it was patent that different forms of life were present—and (b) how these were responding to changes that were occurring not only in the region but in the whole of Portugal and, indeed, in the whole world. My initial project was to account for the forms of life of the rural population, but soon I realized that I faced problems in doing that. In fact, I came to see my very fascination with rurality as somehow suspect, to the extent that it reflected some of the central aporias of belonging that structured local society and that posed serious problems of description, as I will proceed to explain.

First, I had to account for the fact that rural society itself was pervaded by dynamics of class differentiation. There was an observable differentiation associated with landed property. For example, daughters of landless households found it almost impossible to get officially married and most frequently ended up as unmarried mothers. This, however, did not express itself openly in terms of forms of life—or, as anthropologists are prone to say, "in terms of culture." Those who lived in rural areas gave strong evidence of a unitary sense of local community and shared an identifiable form of life in spite of widely different levels of access to land and comfort. Rural people emphatically denied that there were substantive differences between them. Moreover, there was a dynamic of globalization that meant that men were migrating to foreign lands where they were engaging in very different socioeconomic environments in order to gain the means to reproduce a local rural form of life that was visibly no longer fully self-sustainable.

Second, I found that, in order to describe the peasant form of life, it was necessary to postulate (even if only implicitly) its local alternative. In other words, there seemed to exist *minhoto counterpoints*. At first, I was not aware of this. But, as I carried out my self-ascribed task of describing the form of life of the peasants that were engaged in a form of subsistence agriculture, I found that I could not help but contrast it to another form of life. It was only halfway through the research that, progressively, it became clear to me that describing the mode of life of the peasants in the hillside parishes implied inevitably accounting for its local alternative, the mode of life of the lower middle classes living in and around the market towns and urban centers.

In fact, one of the difficulties that I had to confront during the early processes of drafting my manuscript

was a dearth of self-acknowledged descriptive terms for the regions, processes, groups, and forms of life that I had, willy-nilly, to identify. For a serious-minded young ethnographer like I was then, this turned out to be a source of anxiety and perplexity (see [1993] 2008). Not only were the terms to describe these emergent entities muted in local everyday interactions but, by making them explicit in my account, I was somehow breaking a veil of comfort. I learned soon enough how to ask about them and how to interpret the answers I received, but the people I spoke to did not think it really advisable to use clear descriptive terms about the different forms of life. For them, these seemed to breach comfortable social discourse. As time went on, I became aware that this kind of equivocation (this ambiguity of reference) was operating at different levels of belonging. Only now, retrospectively and with some hindsight, do I have enough distance to be able to see that this discomfort with identification occurred at least at three distinct levels and that they were interlinked.

The first level corresponded to the *casa* (the primary social unit, that is, the social entity where persons were cared for during infancy and where they received their main forms of personal identification). The same word, casa (lit. house), was used both for middle-class homes and for peasant homes, and yet the nature of the two entities differed radically, as I could daily observe. This difference was patent in terms of what and who composed the casa, how it reproduced itself across generations, how it was named, the role it played economically, how it was inhabited, how they differed architectonically, etc. Different kinds of entities received a similar name. However, this equivoque also operated within each of the forms of life, where similarly named entities were being treated differently.

As I came to observe, among the peasant group, there seemed to be a further equivocation concerning how casas came together into *freguesias* (communes, or better still parishes, as they cohered around a church and graveyard). Indeed, those who owned land were in possession of a casa in a very different sense from those who, although they did have a dwelling that they called casa, did not own land. While the members of the casas who owned land were treated as full members of the parish (as "neighbors," *vizinhos*), the members of the units that did not own land were sometimes treated as neighbors and other times as not. When I asked if someone was someone else's neighbor, the answer would be given in terms of proximity of residence and it would include people who did not own land. But, when I asked how many "neighbors" there was in a particular parish, the answer, now counted in terms of houses and not persons (and the corresponding name list used to account for participation in communal events), would routinely include only the casas that owned land. The casas of all of those who did not own land were being left out. In short, the very attribution of existence to the primary social unit and its integration into a base community were dependent on a set of values that both differed across the two forms of life *and* instituted a kind of primacy of belonging (a different *ontological weight*) to some over others.

Then, I became aware of a further level of equivocation related to this first one. There seemed to be a problem in actually categorizing and naming the patent difference that existed between the two forms of life. No one locally would be willing to describe him or herself personally either by the adjective "peasant" (*camponês*) or by the corresponding middle-class label (in local terms, *burguês*). While the difference between the two forms of life was more than clear to everyone around, being called one or the other would have been insulting. As time passed, I came to realize that this silence was related to the equivocation that characterized the different levels of institutional belonging (domestic/casa, communal/freguesia, national/povo). Somehow, whoever was a member of a peasant house that owned land was in some way more of a member of the general category of "people" (*povo*) than others (either the peasants who owned no land or the urban dwellers). National entitlement seemed to be informally accounted for by means of a word the meaning of which shifted in parallel with the equivocation concerning being a member of the parish. The same ambiguity seemed to be present at both scales, national and communal.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, general political culture in Portugal attributed the essential political primacy of national belonging to a category that is named in the singular as *o povo português* (*the* Portuguese people). But there was a clear disjunction between those who had the right to claim to be a member of the povo and those who were supposed better to represent that same povo. This aporia was brilliantly exploited in one of Portugal's most famous songs—"Povo que lavas no rio," by Amália Rodrigues, based on a poem by Pedro Homem de Mello (1948). The poem's refrain famously declares that the poet shared the povo's condition, but its life (and, implicitly, the hardship of it) he would not suffer. This turned out to be the main question that I explored in my second book on Minho—*Aromas*

de urze e de lama, an exercise in ethnopoetics, written at the end of the 1980s ([1993] 2008).

When I reached Alto Minho in 1977 only three years had passed since a major political revolution had taken place that had been carried out in the name of the povo. Yet, I discovered that those whom everyone thought of as the povo par excellence did not, in fact, feel that they were represented by the Revolution. The politically modernizing revolution turned out to have been carried out by urban people who did not feel fully identified by the category povo, in whose name the Revolution had been carried out. A good part of the Portuguese (those who lived in urban environments—certainly the politically most powerful) did not identify as part of the more embracing category of "the Portuguese people." By being urban they were somehow modern and cosmopolitan. In turn, that meant that their claim to autochthony was diminished. As my ethnography matured, I became increasingly conscious of the fact that this equivocation actually prolonged the duplicity of standards of belonging related to the parish and the casa that I described above. It turned out that I too (as a city boy) was part of my own ethnographic entanglement.

Finally, the third challenge of description that confronted me concerned how I would name the people whose ethnography I was about to write. This was a problem that I had not anticipated and that was derived as much from the equivocation concerning political belonging and rights of autochthony described above, as from the tradition of ethnographic primitivism into which I had inserted myself. I could have said that I was studying the rural dwellers of this or that parish (the pseudonyms I used at the time were Paço and Couto), but that was not enough, since there was nothing special or especially distinctive about these two parishes. They were essentially like all other riverside parishes in the region and, in fact, I had chosen them precisely because I felt that they were clearly characteristic of the whole region. Now the broader region was called Minho, but the upland valleys where I set up my observation post were a distinctive part of Minho—the Alto (or High) Minho. Yet, if I were to claim that I was studying the Alto Minho, I would have to contemplate also the middle-class people who lived in the towns and city of the region. But there were two problems with doing that: first, I could not claim to study all forms of life with the same intensity; second, the middle class of the region did not feel at all as being characteristically part of that region. They claimed to be (and in fact were) engaged in a form of urban lifestyle that was, to them, characteristic of the whole of Portugal and, further still, of the whole of the globalized world.

So, how to write an ethnography of a people without a name? I ended up opting for calling the collective subjects of my study *minhotos* (Minho dwellers) but I had to warn the reader that I was, in this way, manipulating the meaning of the word by making it refer specifically to the rural forms of life that, using sociological theory, I identified as "peasant." In local parlance, this form of life had no particular way of being named that was not offensive—for, of course, there were offensive names for rural dwellers, who were supposed to be less educated, less civilized, more primitive, more archaic, more savage than urban dwellers. But, imbued with a good amount of youthful earnestness, I loathed the idea of reproducing such middle-class stereotypes.

In short, much as in Cuba, my *minhoto counterpoints* were clearly identifiable but not easily named, as they corresponded to an emergence that related conflictually with the narratives of autochthony that structured the long term of the Portuguese nation and the Minho region in particular. In fact, in an essay that I wrote after publishing the book and that I used as the final chapter of the Portuguese translation (1986b), I explored this question of autochthony and the narratives of belonging to a land which, ultimately, was not even supposed to belong to the people who inhabited it. I had soon come to discover that the people among whom I lived in the hillside parishes of the Alto Minho did not consider themselves to be the first ocupants of the land. Although Minho had never been part of the regions of the Iberian Peninsula where there had been Islamic occupation, minhotos talked of a group of first dwellers that they called "moors" (*mouros*, Islamic North Africans), who manifested features that were strange mirror-opposites of those they defined as their own. I was shown striking rock formations where these mouro people were supposed to have emerged from the ground and where they still manifested themselves in a kind of oneiric claim to the land.

What this meant, was that the ambiguity of belonging to the land that was manifested by the forms of equivocation concerning belonging that I described above seemed to be ultimately impossible to resolve. I came to see this ambiguity of belonging as an essential feature of local sociality—a dynamic of creativity without which the national political system would implode, as it would otherwise have been too tightly closed in on itself. Much later in my career, I was to explore further this same sort of ambivalent openness in terms of the Portuguese

imperial expansion to other regions of the globe. I encountered a dynamic sense of belonging in places where the Portuguese had settled in the past but were no longer dominant that I called "Lusotopy" (2014) and that constituted a series of space/times built upon divergent manifestations of forms of Portuguese pastness. These references to Portugal represented the same kind of essential cthonic ambiguity that operated as a door to creativity not unlike that which the moors played in the Alto Minho.

Metaphysical pluralism and ontological weight

The kind of essential ambiguity in national belonging that I have just described grants it a kind of dynamism. This facilitates the management of actual real positions in an ever-changing, historically evolving world. I consider this feature yet another manifestation of metaphysical pluralism, since it opens up the system foundationally. I now want to argue that, within a single form of life, there can be different modes of apportioning presence and that these have a structuring effect upon that form of life—they are features of its emergence. The process of entanglement that produces a form of life as an emergent entity does not depend on a closing of plurality, an individualization. To the contrary, as I suggested above, it relies both on vagueness (indeterminacy) and on scale change (underdetermination), the two aspects of metaphysical pluralism. I will rely here on an ethnographic vignette which I have used elsewhere already for different analytical purposes (Pina-Cabral 2017: 161–66).

As Bourdieu taught us, following in Mauss's footsteps, a form of life is reproduced from generation to generation as a habitus—that is, as a set of dispositions that are manifested by particular persons ([1972] 1977). As this happens, certain entities and certain configurations acquire greater centrality within the economies of meaning that structure that form of life. These are aspects of the world that, for those who share that form of life, create a scaffold around which other aspects of the world can arrange themselves meaningfully; thus, the centrality of these entities is instituted over time by the very process of constitution of meaning.

In short, certain aspects of the person or aspects of the world come to "be" more than others; they assume greater *ontological weight*—that is, certain aspects of the world or hypostatizations of them play a greater integrative role in the emergence of a particular form of life. It is not a matter of the existence of other aspects being questioned or suspended, but rather a matter of greater confirmation. Certain aspects of person or world are less prone to being silenced; they are more present; there is a greater readiness to affirm their existence. This came to my attention for the first time when I was studying the way in which personhood is manifested in naming practices. I came to the conclusion that certain aspects of personhood were attributed greater ontological weight than others and that this was structurally significant in terms of the general configuration of the naming systems and their relation to the forms of life to which they corresponded (Pina-Cabral 2010). For the ethnographer, it is immensely important to identify these, since they constitute central landmarks in the configuration of each form of life and it is this that Ortiz does when he shows us how tobacco and sugar function as integrative aspects of their respective "counterpoints."

I will exemplify this by recalling a moment of epiphany during my work in the Alto Minho. By the time it came to pass, the main period of fieldwork was over and the thesis had already been examined. As I was now living in Portugal, however, I could go back for shorter visits to see my friends in Paço. I was preparing the version of the ethnography that was eventually to be published (Pina-Cabral 1986a). My closest companion in Paço was a man everyone knew as Morgado who was a passionate supporter of the "old ways," that is to say, the peasant modes of living that were by then becoming obsolete and which were the central theme of my work. This was a fascination we both shared and our sincere friendship was rooted in it. He was a relatively wealthy peasant who bossed over a large, traditional-style casa and who had never been tempted to migrate, unlike the majority of his coevals in Minho. Although he was politically agnostic (being prone towards distrusting human nature in general), he had been the parish president (the lowest level of elected official) for the last decades of the fascist regime. This meant that, by the time I met him, after the 1974 Democratic Revolution, he was in a sort of forced retirement from public life; his cousin's husband had succeeded him as parish president. Still, he remained the undisputed authority on all that had to do with rural life.

Many of the people who had emigrated in the late 1950s and 1960s were now returning home and investing their hard-earned savings in buying back the land that the wealthier townspeople had accumulated in the 1930s and 1940s, when conditions in rural regions in Portugal had been dire. The dream of the returned migrant was to become a landed peasant with a large and

colorful house facing the road. That was their idea of the worthy life, even after all those decades living and working in Paris, Lille, Newark, or Toronto.

What they wanted to buy were not large tracts of land, but small plots to grow maize, beans, and wine (*vinho verde*) in what is a hilly, well irrigated region (Wateau 2002). Still, their parents had lost the land they had owned to the urban moneylenders or, alternatively, had had to endure hunger and misery in order not to sell it. This meant that their children, who went away to France or the United States, upon their return were desperate to show that they were not *cabaneiros* (literally, hut dwellers)—that is, people of no concern, who did not own land and, therefore, did not have a casa worthy of the name. The land, not the building, turned out to be the central defining factor in deciding whether one truly had a "house" and, thus, whether one was truly a member of the parish (the freguesia).

As a result, by the early 1980s, on the morning that I went out to the fields down by the river with Morgado, there were lots of people buying land and he was being regularly asked by the registry office in town to work as a land assessor. Throughout the whole district, he was officially and unofficially recognized as the person who could give the last word on such matters. We arrived at the designated plot—a reasonably good one, with a well-tended pergola all round it and a small stretch of forest with chestnut trees uphill from it. A canal that passed halfway through it irrigated the land. In this case, as I seem to remember, the plot was of disputed heritage.

This was not the first time I had gone out with him and I had quickly learned his basic moves. He would start by dividing the land in easily measurable right-angled triangles and thus, with three or four measures of a long knotted string, he would ascertain its size in square meters. Then came the part that constituted an epiphany to me. He would mentally reduce the land, whatever there was of it, to basic maize production and ascertain, from the quality of the soil and the nature of the irrigation, how many carts of maize such a piece of land might yield. (*Carros de milho*, the traditional land measure, refers to the old oxcarts that were by then no longer in use, assuming that they were filled with sheathed maize cobs.) Then he would add some value for the likely wine crop; then he would subtract the value of things like bad walls or falling-down pergolas; then he would subtract some for the part that was forested; then he would add more or less depending on the nature of the trees and whether they were above the main point of access to the plot or below it; then he would count in the fruit trees that might exist; then he would take into account the ease of reach from the main road; and so on.

What struck me was that the land was essentially valued by how much maize it might produce, whether it was best suited for that purpose or not. This seemed extraordinary, since in fact the likelihood was that this particular plot, when sold, would be used for building a house. But, at that point, he had been asked to ascertain "the value of the land" and there was no doubt for him or for anybody else around (much as they certainly had not thought about it like I am putting it here) that the essential value of the land was what it would produce in terms of the staple food, maize bread (*broa*).

At that point, I understood all of a sudden something that I felt I already knew but that I had not known how to say: maize had greater ontological weight than other foods, other aspects of the world, and most other entities in general. I now understood why the central marker of value for a peasant "house" was the visible granary standing out elegantly on its tall granite legs. Morgado's own, proudly placed in the hillside in front of the door to his kitchen, had its woodwork painted in red, even though, these days, it no longer made any sense to store grain there, and it was mostly being used as a tool shed.

This illuminated much of what I had already written in the thesis. And, in fact, retrospectively, I understood why I had felt it necessary to go through the trouble of researching certain things: to unearth the history of maize in the region; the details of the ritual of bread-making and its implications for gender relations and household constitution; the central importance of female fertility in a region where marriage was essentially uxorilocal; the meaning of not having land, not eating one's own bread, and therefore being morally suspicious; how people claimed (against all likelihood) that they could taste with certainty whether or not a portion of maize bread was made in their casa; why in all the years I was there, I never managed to get anyone to provide me regularly with broa for a weekly price; etc. (Pina-Cabral 1986a). I suddenly found a nexus between all of these things and many more.[1]

In rural Alto Minho, by the mid-twentieth century, maize, a crop that had arrived in the middle decades of the eighteenth century, had become the staple food and the mainstay of peasant living. Their world, as opposed to that of the people in the towns and cities, was dependent on the notion that the good life was one where one

1. The following four paragraphs are taken, for the most part, from my earlier description of this event in Pina-Cabral 2017: 162–66.

produced one's own food on one's own land—and that food was, par excellence, broa; all other foodstuffs were seen as additions to it. Thus broa became the central mode of distinguishing those who had value, and therefore had a right to be there, from those who did not, and were therefore mere passing residents. Their persons, their houses, their community existed more or less to the extent that they were capable of ensuring their own subsistence from their own land by means of broa.

I should note here that this did not mean that the region was ever demonetarized. To the contrary, there has been money circulating in these hills since the Pax Romana brought the population down from the hilltops to the riverside plots. Later, minhoto peasants were in the forefront of Portuguese empire-building at the onset of the modern era and, later still, in the nineteenth century, of economic migration to Brazil, Europe, or North America. Ever since the fifteenth century, therefore, there had been men (and also, to a lesser extent, women) returning to these houses from all sorts of very distant places around the world (India, China, Africa, Brazil, Australia, North America). Therefore, what was being celebrated with maize bread was not sustenance as such—for many of the returned migrants over the centuries had eaten many and very diverse foodstuffs throughout their travels or as sailors in the cod fisheries off Newfoundland.

What was being celebrated by attributing greater ontological weight to maize and maize bread was its centrality in a certain form of life; the role it played in configuring who each one of these persons was and desired to be. What surprised me, in a way, was how I suddenly was confronted with the presence of the past (the pastness) in a social situation where, indeed, the centrality of maize was no longer what it had been. I was surprised not by how things changed, but by how they survived.

For each one of those people, maize did not "represent" anything; rather, it tied up a nexus of meanings that, in being shared and in acquiring hegemonic implications over a long period of time, became more present, more visible, more likely to be retained by each person in his or her daily dealings. No wonder that, after each meal, Morgado's wife would carefully gather the breadcrumbs left on the table top and spread them around the house outside the walls. This way the souls of the dead would eat them and be grateful, and thus leave the residents of the house alone, granting it prosperity.

The way in which *world* is scaffolded not only by the presence of entities but also by their relative ontological weight might equally well be exemplified by recourse to images such as the statues of the Virgin, the nativity scene, or the crucifixion that one encounters all over the Christian world. These icons (and the stories that are told about them) facilitate access to a set of meanings; they constitute paradigmatic scenes (Needham 1985: 67–69) to the extent that they are modes of apportioning ontological weight, of reminding people what entities and actions are more present in their world. Stephan Palmié wisely claims: "All human lifeworlds . . . include agentive 'nonhuman' mediators that, in their own ways and to locally and historically varying degrees, not only generate affordances, but also make demands upon us" (2014: 155). To further his insight, one might claim that (a) the "nonhuman" quality of these mediators is bound to be ambivalent, since they are an integral part of the emergence of each one of us as a person (we participate in things too—see Pina-Cabral 2018b), and (b) we must be attentive not only to their intervening in our lifeworlds as affordances, but also to the varying intensity of their intervention.

If I now attempt to shift my gaze to the other minhoto counterpoint—the form of life of the urban middle classes—I can clearly see that maize was present in town, too, yet it played no significant role, apart from its use as a component in the fabrication of a locally cherished type of bread. The closest simile among the urban dwellers to the role played by maize in the peasant worldview is probably the role played by money and particularly money as what makes up a salary. Recently, much groundbreaking anthropological work has been undertaken that shows how money is labile as a social relation, constituting "an integral part of the hierarchies and networks of exchange through which it circulates" (Hart and Ortiz 2014: 466; see also Neiburg 2016). This discussion, however, need not occupy us at this point, since what I wanted to exemplify above by reference to maize can easily be generalized: forms of life are emergent features of the world of humans and part of the aspect of their emergence is the relative ontological weight attributed to different aspects of the world. This "distributed ontology," as we might call it, is part of what I call metaphysical pluralism and it shows how emergence results from the entanglement of everyday life through the way in which certain aspects of the world come to interact with the form of life as a whole (see Hattiangadi 2005).

Conclusion

At this point, however, we are still left with a problem associated with the musical metaphor of "counterpoints" proposed by Ortiz. The dictionary definition of

counterpoint is "the relationship between voices that are harmonically interdependent yet independent in rhythm and contour." In other words, what he proposes is that each of the elements of the contrapunteo is "independent in rhythm and contour" but harmonically interdependent to the extent that both of them participate in each other mutually. Counterpoint implies scale, for it implies that the parts, as parts, relate with the whole, as whole. That is, the two components are mutual not only in the sense of affecting each other, but also in the sense of somehow sharing a common existence at a higher scale (Pina-Cabral 2013); they participate in each other while remaining separately structured.

Now, in the history of Cuba, Ortiz argues at length that the two forms of life that he identifies—surrounding tobacco and sugar—are independent in the way they structure themselves and in their internal dynamics, yet they both come to contribute towards and interact within what, at a higher level, is the national existence of Cuba. We are left with a strange doubt: is the oppositional (binarist) nature of the counterpunctuality part of what creates that relation of independent interdependence that gives rise to what he calls "transculturality"? Or is it merely that in Cuba there are two forms of life, when it would be perfectly possible for three to exist? This question is sneaky. It does not seem to bear a clear answer, but the trouble it causes (that is, the entanglement between observer measurement and emergence) is all the more problematic for it.

Much the same can be asked about the counterpunctuality of the peasant and urban modes of life that I observed in the Alto Minho. In fact, we were long ago reminded by the classic work of Robert Redfield that the two modes of life are historically interdependent, not only in southern Europe but also wherever a form of peasant life has come into existence around the globe (Redfield 1956). He speaks of the "little community" as being a "part-society," to the extent that it is largely separate from state society in its internal constitution but deeply dependent on it. In Minho too, the role of the small towns and their urban elites as instruments of encompassment of peasant economy and peasant religious life cannot be played down. Nor is it in any way easy to decide chronologically when it was that all this started. Ever since Roman occupation (ca. 3rd century BC), when the populations of the hilltop hamlets (the *castros*) were driven out of their eagle nests and made to work the fertile fields of the lower lands as serfs of Romanized landlords, a relation evolved of mutual interdependence based on relative separation.

As Portugal changed in the course of the 1980s, and particularly after it entered the European Economic Community in 1986, for the first time in over a millennium, this counterpunctual relation seems to have vanished. There are still manifestations of rural/urban differentiation, but the sense of diversification of a worldview, the sense of distinct traditions of personal identification that were carried by the peasant/urban counterpunctuality seems to have vanished. Most people in the countryside live today in what can be considered a form of periurbanity. This is not unique to Portugal, of course. It is, indeed, a broader feature of southern Europe—of those regions of our semi-continent where the industrial revolution did not manifest itself with great impact during the nineteenth century.

What does this mean for the way in which society is structured in southern Europe today? How will it come to affect the sense of national belonging, particularly by relation to the ultimate measure of political legitimacy—I mean autochthony? Might we consider that the role that immigration has been playing of late as a kind of phantasmagoria of national ideological life is a form of reinstitution of the sort of counterpunctually ambiguous imbalance of belonging that characterized the urban/rural polarity, as we saw it manifested in the indeterminacy of meaning of the word povo? Is there anywhere in the world where autochthony does not present itself as a dynamic aporia? If this aporic nature of autochthony is a general condition of sociality, then, metaphysical pluralism is a feature of all long-term processes of social constitution. The contrapunteo, then, would not be a Cuban idiosyncrasy, but a historical inevitability of all mature social systems.

What these observations suggest is that schismogenesis is an inevitable aspect of all ontogenesis. In other words, the persistence of entities in time (each person, each house, each nation) is mutually dependent on their relative differentiation in space (the contrast of different forms of life)—this would be the ultimate implication of the concept of metaphysical pluralism.[2] In taking that stand, we would be retracing the footsteps of Derrida, when he insists on the dual meaning of constitutive "difference" (*différance*, 1982: 6–9): meaning at the same time both "to defer" in time and "to diverge" in space. These are questions that I leave here as challenges. But

2. I propose here that an ethnography of presence need not imply a collapse into ethnocentrism, a metaphysics of presence, in the sense Derrida gives to these expressions (1967).

they do emerge directly from our reading of Ortiz's work all these decades after it was written. They are proof of the creativity and acuteness of his initial vision.

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to Jaume Mascaró, Joan Bestard Camps, and Stephan Palmié for the invitation to participate in the "Workshop Fernando Ortiz: Caribbean and Mediterranean Transculturations" organized by the Institut Minorquí d'Estudis in Ciutadella, Minorca, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Ortiz's death. This was a memorable occasion both personally and academically. At the time of writing this paper, I was Professor of Social Anthropology at the School of Anthropology and Conservation of the University of Kent; I thank the School for its support of my research activities.

References

Ardener, Edwin. 2007 (1977). "Comprehending others." In *The voice of prophecy*, 159–85. Oxford: Berghahn.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977 (1972). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davidson, Donald. 2001. *Subjective, intersubjective, objective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

De Jaegher, Hanne, and Ezequiel Di Paolo. 2007. "Participatory sense-making: An enactive approach to social cognition." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6 (4): 485–507.

Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Eds de Minuit.

———. 1982. "Différance." In *Margins of philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, 1–28. Brighton: Harvester Press.

Gallagher, Shaun. 2009. "Two problems of intersubjectivity." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (6–8): 289–308.

Hart, Keith, and Horacio Ortiz. 2014. "The anthropology of money and finance: Between ethnography and world history." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 465–82.

Hattiangadi, Jagdish. 2005. "The emergence of minds in space and time." In *The mind as a scientific object: Between brain and culture*, edited by Christina E. Erneling and David Martel Johnson, 79–100. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Homem de Mello, Pedro. 1948. *Miserere*. Lisbon: Ed. Portugália.

Husserl, Edmund. 1970 (1954). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*, translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Mintz, Sidney. 1996. "Enduring substances, trying theories: The Caribbean region as oikoumene." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (2): 289–311.

Needham Rodney. 1980 (1978). "Analogical classifications." In *Reconnaissances*, 41–62. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

———. 1985. *Exemplars*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 1987. *Counterpoints*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Neiburg, Federico. 2016. "A true coin of their dreams: Imaginary monies in Haiti. The 2010 Sidney Mintz Lecture." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 75–93.

Ortiz, Fernando. 2002 (1940). *El contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar*. Madrid: Cátedra.

Palmié, Stephan. 2006. "Creolization and its discontents." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35: 433–56.

———. 2014. "Technotheosis." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20 (1): 154–56.

Pina-Cabral, Joao.1986a. *Sons of Adam, daughters of Eve: The peasant worldview of the Alto Minho*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1986b. "Paved roads and enchanted Mooresses: The perception of the past among the peasant population of the Alto Minho (NW Portugal)." *Man* n.s. 22 (4): 715–35.

———. 2008 (1993). *Aromas de urze e de lama*. Lisbon: ICS.

———. 2010. "The truth of personal names." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 (2): 297–312.

———. 2013. "The two faces of mutuality: Contemporary themes in anthropology." *Anthropological Quarterly* 86 (1): 257–74.

———. 2014. "Lusotopy as ecumene." In *Anthropology now and next: Essays in honor of Ulf Hannerz*, edited by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Christina Garton, and Shalini Randeria, 241–63. London: Berghahn Books.

———. 2017. *World: An anthropological examination*. Chicago: HAU Books.

———. 2018a. "Turning to life: A comment." *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (3): 522–29.

———. 2018b. "Modes of participation." *Anthropological Theory* 18 (4): 435–55.

———. 2020. "On embracing the vague." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10 (3): 786–99.

Redfield, Robert. 1956. *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wateau, Fabienne. 2002. *Partager l'eau: Irrigation et conflits au nord-ouest du Portugal*. Paris: CNRS/Eds Maison des sciences de l'homme.

João PINA-CABRAL is Research Professor at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (Portugal) and Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the School of Anthropology and Conservation of the University of Kent (UK). He was cofounder and President of the Portuguese Association of Anthropology and of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. His work has dealt with the relationship between symbolic thought and social power; personhood and the family; ethnicity in postcolonial contexts; and ethnographic theory. He has carried out fieldwork in Portugal, southern China (Macau), and northeast Brazil (Bahia). His books include *Sons of Adam, daughters of Eve* (Clarendon Press, 1986); *Between China and Europe: Person, culture and emotion in Macau* (Berg, 2002), *Gente livre* (Terceiro Nome, 2013) with Vanda Aparecida da Silva, and *World: An anthropological examination* (HAU Books, 2017).

João Pina-Cabral
pina.cabral@ics.ulisboa.pt